

Project to get young lives back on track in Heathfield

Published on **Monday 30 January 2012 09:00, Sussex Express**

HEATHFIELD celebrates a national first this week with the successful completion of one groundbreaking youth project - and the start of the next.

Heathfield Works - a scheme aimed at getting young lives back on track - is run by charity Tomorrow's People and the Heathfield Partnership.

It's the only scheme of its kind operating in a rural community.

Partnership chairman Rupert Simmons explained people understand inner-city deprivation but ignore the isolation and transport problems faced by youngsters in the countryside.

At last week's Heathfield Parish Council meeting he described how the project had worked to date and where it might go in the future. He said ten young people were guided and placed in either full time jobs or education. Examples are a youth embarking on military recruitment, others working for local firms and a girl at college studying performing arts. He went on: "Our nearest job centre is in Eastbourne. The journey there costs £8 return and they are not always encouraging to youngsters from our area."

He continued: "We work with employers too so we can deal with problems from both sides when people have had no reason to get up in the morning or dress properly for work. Also, we don't say goodbye when the programme finishes - we stay in touch with all of them." The scheme achieved national publicity with features in both the Observer and Guardian newspapers.

A new programme began this week and a total of £110,000 is needed to continue. "Our job is to fundraise and convince Government this is an important issue. It has proved extremely worthwhile and we can honestly say we believe we have turned these young lives around. We'd like to do the same for more."

Now a ceremony will be held at the Heathfield Youth Centre next Friday when youngsters themselves have the chance to describe their experiences to Lord Lieutenant Peter Field and County leader Peter Jones. Wealden Chief Inspector Richard Coates will also explain the difference the scheme has made to the community.